

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----007519 072043Z /41

R 071835Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1121

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ROME 4269

EXDIS

FROM VATICAN OFFICE

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PGOV, IT, VT
SUBJECT: THE VATICAN AND THE CURRENT ITALIAN POLITICAL CRISIS

REF: ROME 429, ROME 2707

1. SUMMARY. THE VATICAN IS PERCEIVED BY SOME OBSERVERS AS BEING "RELAXED" DURING THE PRESENT ITALIAN POLITICAL CRISIS. WE BELIEVE THAT THIS IS NOT ENTIRELY CORRECT. THE VATICAN, HAS BEEN DEEPLY PREOCCUPIED WITH THE ITALIAN CRISIS AND REMAINS CONCERNED ABOUT THE ONGOING NEGOTIATIONS. THE VATICAN IN THIS SHARED THE ITALIAN CATHOLIC WORLD'S CONCERN THAT THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS MIGHT ENGAGE IN AN INDEPENDENT POLITICAL DEAL WITH THE COMMUNIST PARTY (PCI), WHICH WOULD BE CONTRARY TO ITS ELECTORAL PROMISES. NEVERTHELESS, ITS VIEWS WERE CONVEYED LARGELY IN PRIVATE AND ONLY CIRCUMSPECIVELY IN PUBLIC. THE LOW PUBLIC PROFILE, ESPECIALLY WHEN CONTRASTED WITH ITS PUBLIC ACTIVITIES IN 1975-76, IS RELATED TO ITS PERCEPTION AND CONFIDENCE THAT THE REVIVED ITALIAN CATHOLIC WORLD IS CAPABLE OF STANDING ON ITS OWN VIS-A-VIS THE DC. MOREOVER, ITS LOWER PUBLIC POSTURE MAY BE RELATED TO A JUDGEMENT THAT IT DOES NOT WISH TO ANTAGONIZE THE PCI SINCE THE LATTER'S BENEVOLENCE IS NECESSARY TO THE REVISION OF THE CONCORDAT

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AND THE AVOIDANCE OF AN EXTREME LIBERALIZATION OF, OR A REFERENDUM ON, ABORTION. THE FOLLOWING IS AN ANALYSIS OF THE VATICAN PUBLIC POSTURE ON THE CURRENT ITALIAN CRISIS. END SUMMARY.

2. THE VATICAN DURING THE PAST FIFTEEN YEARS HAS SOUGHT TO DISENGAGE ITSELF FROM DIRECT INVOLVEMENT IN ITALIAN

POLITICS. THIS POSUTRE IS IN LINE WITH THE VATICAN COUNCIL II GUIDELINES WHICH ENDEAVOR TO OPEN UP THE CHURCH TO THE MODERN WORLD AND WHICH PROVIDE FOR A LESS STRIDENT CHURCH CONFRONTATION WITH CONTEMPORARY IDEOLOGIES. THE VATICAN MADE AN EXCEPTION FOR THE 1976 ITALIAN ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN BECAUSE OF EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES, NOT THE LEAST OF WHICH WAS AN ORGANIZED EFFORT BY THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY (PCI) TO ENLIST A LARGE NUMBER OF PROXQNET CATHOLICS TO RUN FOR PARLIAMENT ON THE PCI ELECTORAL LIST, WHICH WAS ONLY PREVENTED THROUGH THE DIRECT INTERVENTION OF THE POPE AND THE VATICAN. BOTH THE POPE AND THE VATICAN THEN FELT COMPELLED TO STATE AN OLD CHRCH DOCTURINE REGARDING THE IRRECONCILABILITY OF MARXISM AND CHRISTIANITY, AND, THEREFORE, THE INAPPROPRIATENESS OF CATHOLIC COLLABORATIONS WITH MARXISTS.

3. FOLLOWING THE 1976 ELECTIONS, THE VATICAN REVERTED TO A MORE CAUTIOUS POLICY. THERE WERE SEVERAL REASONS FOR THIS:

--IT CONFORMED WITH ITS PREVIOUS POLICY OF NON-INVOLVEMENT;

--IT WAS ENCOURAGE BY THE FACT THAT THE ITALIAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE (CEI) WAS SUFFICIENLY WATCHFUL ON ITALIN DEVELOPMENTS, AS WELL AS STRENGTHENED BY THE ADDITION TO IT OF THE VERY ACTIVE ANTI-COMMUNIST, CARDINAL BENELLI, WHO WAS TRANSFERRED IN MID-1977 TO THE ARCHBISHOPRIC OF FLORENCE FROM HIS POSITION OF

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SUBSTITUE SECRETARY OF STATE AND NUMBER ONE ADVISER TO THE POPE.

-- IT WAS BASED ON AN EVALUATION THAT A NUMBER OF ITALIAN CATHOLIC ORGAIZATIONS, WHICH WERE REVITALIZED, UNDER VATICAN GUIDANCE, DURING THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE ELECTORAL DEBACLE OF JUNE 1975 AND THE ELECTIONS OF JUNE 1976, COULD OPERATE EFFECTIVELY ON THEIR OWN.

4. THUS, IN A WAY, THE VATICAN, DURING THE PRESENT CRISIS, FEELS THAT ITS VIEWS ARE ADEQUATELY EXPRESSED THROUGH A REINVIGORATED CATHOLIC WORLD AND A STREGTHENED BISHOPS'S CONFERENCE. THEREFORE, IT HAS DECIDED THAT IT CAN AFFORD TO FOLLOW A LESS PUBLICLY EXPOSED POLICY ON CURRENT ITALIAN AFFAIRS. PRIVATELY, THE VATICAN, AS WE HAVE REPORTED ELSEWHERE, HAS CONTINUED TO EXPRESS TO KEY CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS ITS OPPOSITION TO ANY DEAL WHICH WOULD BRING THE COMMUNISTS FORMALLY INTO THE PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY MW THE GOVERNMENT.

5. THE LOWER VATICAN PROFILE MAY ALSO BE EXPLICABLE IN RELATION TO TWO CURRENT ISSUES OF GRAT IMPORTANCE TO THE VATICAN: ABORTION AND THE REVISION OF THE CONCORDAT. ON

BOTH ISSUES, THE VATICAN CONSIDERS THAT THE PCI ATTITUDE WILL BE DETERMINING TO THE OUTCOMES; THEREFORE, IT DOES NOT WISH TO ANTAGONIZE THE PCI THROUGH A HIGH POLITICAL PROFILE WHICH COULD (AND WOULD) BE TERMED INTERFERENCE IN ITALIAN POLITICS AND THEREBY STRENGTHEN THOSE IN THE PCI WHO ARE OPPOSED TO BERLINGUER'S ACCOMMODATING LINE ON THE ISSUES. (SIGNIFICANTLY, BERLINGUER ANNOUNCED ON MARCH 5 THAT THERE WAS A NEED TO REACH AN UNDERSTANDING AMONG THE PARTIES TO PREVENT THE REFERENDUM ON ABORTION WHICH IS SCHEDULED FOR THIS SPRING, AND WHICH IS WIDELY CONSIDERED TO BE A VERY DIVISIVE ISSUE.)

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----007569 072044Z /41

R 071835Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1122

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ROME 4269

EXDIS

6 NEVERTHELESS, THE VATICAN'S NEGATIVE ATTITUDE ON ANY ALLIANCE BETWEEN THE PCI AND THE DC HAS BEEN CAREFULLY--ALBIET WITH CIRCUMSCRIPTION--EXPRESSED AND IT IS CLEAR TO THOSE WHO FOLLOW VATICAN AFFAIRS WITH ANY DEGREE OF REGULARITY. THUS, AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PRESENT CRISIS, THE VATICAN ORGAN, L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO, PUBLISHED A LENGTHY ANALYSIS OF THE BERLINGUER LETTER TO THE BISHOP OF IVREA IN WHICH IT POINTED OUT THAT THE CLAIMS OF BERLINGUER THAT THE PCI HAD CHANGED WERE NOT SUPPORTED BY THE FACTS OF THE SITUATION; THAT IT REMAINED ESSENTIALLY A MARXIST/LENINIST PARTY, AND THAT, THEREFORE, THE COLLABORATION OF CATHOLICS WITH IT WAS DANGEROUS. THE VATICAN ORGAN, ON JANUARY 14, PUBLISHED ON ITS FRONT PAGE THE U.S. STATEMENT OF JANUARY 12 REGARDING THE U.S. WISH TO SEE A LESSENING OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE COMMUNISTS IN WESTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. AT THE SAME TIME, L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO ALSO GAVE PROMINENT FRONT-PAGE SPACE TO DR. KISSINGER'S TV PROGRAM ON THE THREAT POSED BY EUROCOMMUNISM TO WESTERN EUROPE. ON JANUARY 27, THE VATICAN ORGAN ALSO FRONT-PAGED THE STRONG ITALIAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE STATEMENT ON THE IRRECONCILABILITY OF MARXISM AND CHRISTIANITY. FURTHERMORE,

L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO IN ITS DAILY COLUMN OF POLITICAL ANALYSIS ON ITALY, CONTINUED TO PLACE THE ACCENT ON THE POSITIONS AND STATEMENTS OF THOSE IN THE DC WHO OPPOSED AN INCREASED ROLE FOR THE PCI IN THE GOVERNING PROCESS, AND HIGHLIGHTED THE POSITION OF THOSE WHO PROPOSED THE RESOLUTION OF THE POLITICAL
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CRISIS THROUGH AN UPDATING OF THE "PROGRAMMATIC ACCORD," RATHER THAN A CHANGE IN THE GENERAL "POLITICAL" CONFIGURATION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF PARLIAMENT.

7. COMMENT. SOME VATICAN OBSERVERS EXPAND ON THE OBSERVATION OF PARA 5 (I.E., THE VATICAN'S INTEREST IN NOT ANTAGONIZING THE PCI BECAUSE OF THE LATTER'S IMPORTANCE OF THE REVISION OF THE CONCORDAT AND ON THE ABORTION ISSUE) BY ATTRIBUTING THE LOWER VATICAN PROFILE TO THE GROWING INFLUENCE AT THE VATICAN OF ARCHBISHOP AGOSTINO CASAROLI, THE VATICAN FOREIGN MINISTER AND FORMALLY THE NO. THREE ADVISOR TO THE POPE. THIS MAY BE AN ADDITIONAL FACTOR BECAUSE CASAROLI, SINCE THE DEPARTURE OF CARDINAL BENELLI FROM THE VATICAN IN MID-1977, HAS ASSUMED A GREATER RESPONSIBILITY IN SHAPING VATICAN POLICY TOWARD ITALY AND--ALTHOUGH HE SHARES BENELLI'S PREOCCUPATION WITH THE STRENGTH OF THE PCI--HE IS KNOWN TO PREFER AN INDIRECT RATHER THAN A DIRECT VATICAN ROLE IN ITALIAN POLITICS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, POLITICAL SITUATION, CHURCH STATE RELATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 07 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978ROME04269
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780103-0263
Format: TEL
From: ROME
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780397/aaaadelz.tel
Line Count: 199
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 44c332cc-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Reference: 78 ROME 429, 78 ROME 2707
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3416475
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: THE VATICAN AND THE CURRENT ITALIAN POLITICAL CRISIS
TAGS: PGOV, IT, VT
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/44c332cc-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014